



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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NEWS RELEASE

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Commissioner Calls for Community Engagement to Turn Around Schools Education Department Announces Steps to Improve Schools in Central Falls, Providence

Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist announced today (January 11, 2010) that she will work closely with school districts and local communities to turn around the persistently lowest-achieving schools in Rhode Island and to accelerate these schools toward greatness.

Under the new Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) protocol for interventions, districts with persistently low-achieving schools must “engage affected family and community members in the work of reforming” these schools. Community members, will serve on “stakeholder groups” to advise the superintendent on turning around these schools. Additionally, districts must put in place “ongoing mechanisms for meaningful and periodic family and community engagement in appropriate languages,” as well as a communications strategy and a transportation plan that accommodates students’ needs.

“While there are great teachers in *every* school in Rhode Island, these schools have struggled to provide a high-quality education. The time has come to act more decisively and comprehensively,” Commissioner Gist said. “Our students and their families deserve access to the very best education system, and the economic well-being of our state depends on it. The best way to accelerate our schools toward greatness is to engage the entire community in the process. I’m confident that the efforts beginning today will improve the lives of hundreds of children who have been consigned to low-achieving schools.”

Today RIDE identified six persistently low-achieving schools that will be the first schools to undertake intervention under the new protocol:

Charlotte Woods Elementary School, Providence
Central Falls Senior High School, Central Falls
Feinstein High School, Providence
Lillian Feinstein Elementary School at Sackett Street, Providence
Roger Williams Middle School, Providence
William B. Cooley, Sr., Health & Science Technology High School, Providence

“The groundwork is laid for accelerated reform. The Providence Public School District has set the course for dramatic change and has already made important strides,” said Providence Schools Superintendent Thomas M. Brady. “The push by federal and state authorities to

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aggressively implement reform at our lowest-performing schools will allow us to marshal the collective will and the resources to bring about change that will dramatically improve the quality of education that our students receive.”

Providence Mayor David N. Cicilline added: “This is an historic opportunity to enact lasting reforms that will guarantee that every child in every one of our schools, now and in the future, will receive the excellent education he or she deserves.”

“The Central Falls School system looks forward with great anticipation to the reforming opportunities ahead,” said Dr. Frances Gallo, superintendent of schools in Central Falls. “The climate is one of enthusiastic anticipation among our dedicated teachers whose desire to embrace this work exceeds expectation. Our collective work will remove any remaining barriers and accelerate personalized instruction and family engagement in order to galvanize our students toward high academic achievement and strong personal success.”

For each school identified, stakeholder groups, made up in part of parents, teachers, students, and representatives of social-service, health, child-welfare, and workforce-development agencies, will advise the superintendent on the selection of a school-reform model.

The four potential school-reform models are:

Turnaround, which requires a new principal, screening of staff and rehiring of no more than 50 percent, a new governance structure, better use of instructional data, expanded learning time, and social-emotional and community-oriented services and supports for students;

Restart, in which the school reopens under a regional collaborative, a charter-school operator or management organization, an educational-management organization, or a joint labor-management compact;

School closure, in which the district closes the school and enrolls students in other schools that are higher achieving; or

Transformation, replace the principal (unless the principal was recently selected for reform purposes), rigorous evaluations that include rewards for increasing student achievement and removal of those who do not improve their professional practice, instructional reform, increased learning time, ongoing community engagement, and operational flexibility regarding staffing and budgeting.

Superintendents in Central Falls and Providence will convene stakeholder groups for the six schools within 30 days and, with input from these groups, select one of the options within 45 days. Commissioner Gist will respond to the selection within 10 days. The superintendents and the stakeholder groups will then have no more than 120 days to draft a comprehensive school-reform plan. Once the Commissioner accepts the plan, the districts will implement it over the next three years. Districts can and are encouraged to move as quickly as they are able.

If districts cannot fulfill their obligations to select and implement a reform plan, RIDE and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education may take over the school, under provisions of state law, and restructure it or close it.

The RIDE protocol for interventions and the methods for identifying the lowest-achieving schools are based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education regarding the use of funds for high-poverty schools (Title I) and the Race to the Top grant application guidance. RIDE has posted the protocols on its Web site, at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/RIDE/Docs/Protocol_for_Interventions.pdf

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